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MIGUEL LASA

(Reprints of this article are available. See page 126.)

I had asked Miguel Lasa, a young Cuban exile, for an appointment with the hope of obtaining the real story of how President Kennedy's new Cuban policy was affecting the Cuban refugees. But as I sat in his apartment listening to Senor Lasa tell his story, I realized that I was getting more than I had expected, for the tale of horror that was being torn from his lips made me ashamed to be an American.

He sat quietly, his eyes pleading desperately for some reassurance that justice still existed in the world.

"Your government said to wait," he told me. "But for how long? We go to Washington and they say they want an uprising inside of Cuba. How can they have an uprising if we aren't allowed to help them?"

"The underground in Cuba is bigger than ever but they have no arms to fight with. We can't sit here in America waiting for Uncle Sam—we have been waiting for three years. It is our duty to do something. It is a very small thing, but at least it is something.

"The Cubans inside of Cuba—they have to see that we are doing something. There are still six million people in Cuba. Over 150,000 are in jail—our loved ones, our friends, our countrymen. Many have been killed. How long must we wait?"

"Your President says he is our friend. Yet, only a month ago, over 1,000 guns were confiscated by the

United States government. It had taken us six months to get the money for those arms. We had collected it penny by penny. What kind of a friend is that? *What kind of a friend is that?*

"What have we done to you? We have been persecuted by the United States for trying to regain our homeland. In Dade County, Fla., there are 46 Cuban exile leaders confined to the county. If they leave they will be thrown in jail. In Miami we are hiding just like in Cuba. In Havana we have to hide from the G-2—the Communists—and in Miami we have to hide from the CIA and the FBI."

What Can You Say . . ?

What could I say? What could anyone say to this man whose only purpose in life is to free his country from tyranny—and whose every move is thwarted by police-state methods in the United States? As an authoritative story in *U. S. News & World Report* entitled "A Stronger Castro—With U. S. Help?" had reported earlier in the week: "The United States, which once helped Cuban exiles attack, now is causing their arrest for such activity.

"A crackdown has been ordered by the Kennedy Administration against anti-Castro raids mounted or supplied from U. S. territory. To enforce this crackdown, the U. S. Coast Guard in Florida is being beefed. On April 3, reinforcements began pouring in—200 more men, 12 more patrol boats, 6 more amphibious airplanes. . . .

"At the same time the British were seizing one anti-Castro boat in the

Bahamas, American authorities seized another in Miami. . . .

"To Cuban exiles, all this appeared to be an American act of betrayal."

It was the betrayal which bothered Senor Lasa the most—a betrayal which he found incomprehensible.

He looked at me questioningly: "First they (the United States government) promise to help us, and then they betray us. Before the Bay of Pigs invasion, the CIA helped us. It gave us arms and ammunition and helped us to get into Cuba to deliver them. But since that day, when hundreds of Cubans were killed because the United States failed to help us as it had promised, we have received nothing. And now your government won't even let us fight alone."

I remembered as well as he the statement made by Mr. Kennedy two and a half years ago when he was campaigning for the presidency: "We must end the harassment which the government has carried on of liberty-loving anti-Castro forces in Cuba and in other lands. While we cannot violate international law, we must recognize that these exiles and rebels represent the real voice of Cuba, and should not be constantly handicapped by our Immigration and Justice Department authorities."

A U.S. Invasion?

"What is it the Cuban exiles want from our government?" I asked him. "Do you want the United States to invade Cuba?"